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MICRONESIA

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I. PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

1. The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), along with the Republic of Palau, forms the Caroline Islands archipelago. One of the newly emerged Pacific island nations, FSM extends from the equator to 14 degrees north encompassing over 1 million square miles of ocean and a relatively small land area. Comprising the FSM are 607 high volcanic and low coral islands (atolls) only 65 of which are inhabited. The total land area is 270.8 square miles with an additional 2,776 square miles of lagoon areas. The four states of the FSM are, from east to west, the States of Kosrae, Pohnpei (formerly Ponape, renamed in November 1984), Chuuk (formerly Truk, renamed in January 1990) and Yap.

2. Kosrae is the easternmost State of the FSM. Kosrae is 5 degrees north of the equator and about 350 miles east-south-east of Pohnpei. It is a high volcanic island having 42 square miles of land, and it consists primarily of rugged mountainous slopes with only a very narrow coastal plain. Approximately 65 per cent of the island is in forest, 23 per cent in agroforest, 11 per cent in secondary vegetation with the remaining 3 per cent non-forest.

3. Pohnpei is a high volcanic island located 7 degrees north latitude and 158 degrees east longitude. Roughly circular and fringed by relatively dense mangrove forest, the distance across the island is approximately 15 miles. Rugged mountain ridges and deep valleys characterize the interior of the island. The highest elevation on the island is about 2,500 feet above sea level. Approximately 60 per cent of the island is steeply sloped and mountainous. Surrounding the main island is a large lagoon with a total surface area of 70 square miles. Associated with Pohnpei State are eight low coral islands, Mwoakiloa, Nukuoro, Pingelap, Sapwuahfik, Oroluk, Kapingamarangi, Pakin and Ant.

4. The main island of Chuuk contains the immense, 43-mile-long lagoon (about 800 square miles), in which stands segments (98 islands of which 14 are mountainous islands of volcanic origin) of an old volcanic peak that once thrust upwards through the reef. Seven major island groups, including Chuuk proper, comprise Chuuk State with the total land area of 49.2 square miles. Five of the island groups are coral atolls. These include the southern and northern Mortlocks to the south of Chuuk lagoon, the Hall islands to the north, the Nomonuito islands to the north-west and the western islands. The islands within the Chuuk lagoon are Uman, Fefan, Tonowas (Dublon), Weno, Udot, Romonum, Fanapenges, Tol, Paata and Pwene.

5. The western most island of the FSM is Yap. It is located 9 degrees north latitude and 138 degrees east longitude. Yap State consists of four major island groups including Yap proper, Map, Gagil-Tomil and Rumung. The Gagil-Tomil group includes all of the 134 outer islands of Yap. Most of the outer islands are coral atolls and the largest groups are Ulithi and Woleai. The total land area of Yap is 45.9 square miles. As a high island complex, Yap is an exposed part of an 850-mile-long upheaved submarine ridge running northeasterly from Palau. Yap is on the west side of the andesite line.

6. The climate of the FSM is typical of many tropical islands. Temperatures are relatively uniform, averaging in the mid-70 to mid-80 degrees Fahrenheit range. The average annual temperature is 81 degrees Fahrenheit (27 degrees C); humidities average over 80 per cent. The islands are subjected to heavy rainfall, although precipitation decreases from east to west. Rainfall varies from about 110 inches on drier islands to over 400 inches per year in the mountainous interior of Pohnpei. On most islands, there is a pronounced wet season (June to October) and dry season (November to May).

7. The lower islands of Pohnpei and the islands of Chuuk and Yap are subjected to frequent typhoons that often disrupt harvests, render families homeless and cause mass migrations from the predisposed islands within the typhoon belt to those islands that tend to be relatively unscathed.

II. SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY AND CULTURE

8. The population for the FSM is 105,506 (September 1994 census, provisional). The country is burdened with a high population growth rate of 2.1 per cent, resulting in high population densities on some islands. The average population density is 390 per square mile. The age structure for the FSM is as follows: 43.5 per cent 0-14 years, 46.8 per cent 15-49 years, 6 per cent 50-64 years and 3.6 per cent are 65 years and older. The weighted average of life expectancy within the FSM is 65 years for males and 69 years for females (1992).

9. The FSM's 1992 literacy rate is 76.7 per cent. The literacy rate for men is 67 per cent and 87.2 per cent for women. As of 1980, 25 per cent of the population over the age of 25 have had no formal schooling. Thirty-eight per cent had some primary schooling, 11.7 per cent completed their primary education, 7.7 per cent have had some secondary schooling and 9.6 per cent graduated from high school. Eight per cent of the total population had some college or higher education.

10. Education is now compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 14. The state governments operate the public elementary and secondary schools while the national Government runs the College of Micronesia-FSM. Private schools, run by churches, also offer education at both the elementary and secondary levels. National and state governments provide limited financial support for educational activities at the church-affiliated schools.

11. With the exception of the people of Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi (islands of Pohnpei State) who are culturally and linguistically Polynesians, the rest of the inhabitants of the Federated States of Micronesia are Micronesians. Because the four states are separated by a large expanse of water resulting in isolation and infrequent interaction, unique traditions, customs and languages developed on each of the islands prior to Western contact. Four major languages, namely Kosraen, Pohnpeian, Chuukese and Yapese, are spoken in the Federated States of Micronesia. English, however, is the official language.

12. Sharing communal work and the offerings of tributes to the traditional leaders are fundamental to the subsistence economic system and the culture of the island societies in the FSM. The basic economic unit is the household that is comprised of mostly extended families. Larger social groups found on most of the FSM islands are matrilineal clans. Traditional political systems, such as the Nanmwarki Political System on Pohnpei and the Council of Pilung on Yap, continue to play important roles in the lives of the people of FSM.

13. Traditionally, sharing involved agricultural produce and marine resources, but as the money economy becomes more important, sharing now involves money and purchased goods in addition to the traditional items. Sharing and communal work occur at funerals, for example, and the value of money and goods presented and redistributed at funerals can be substantial. According to the Second National Development Plan (1992), the average household in the FSM donates approximately $125 per month to funerals and receives about $12.

III. ECONOMIC SYSTEM

14. The Federated States of Micronesia is a developing country with a money economy that has been steadily increasing in importance since the end of the Second World War. The estimated per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in 1994 was $1,909 (Bank of Hawaii, 1995) which places it in the middle income bracket as determined by the World Bank ($700-$2,800).

15. The major source of income for the FSM is US Compact (see para. 27) funds which will total $1,339,000,000 from 1986 to 2001. These funds are to be distributed in a decreasing fashion over a 15-year period. Together with other United States grants and forms of aid, these United States funds have averaged about $100 million since 1986, which provides about two thirds of the total national revenues. Total domestic revenues are increasing from $41.6 million in 1990, to $60.5 million in 1994 which, combined with Compact and grant ($103.3 million) and non-compact revenues totalled $165.1 million.

16. Government spending has reflected an increase in operational spending (wages, salaries, goods and services) from $109.1 million in 1990

to $138.7 million in 1994, while capital spending has decreased from $51.3 million to $38.9 million during the same period. In 1994, total government spending was $177.6 million.

17. In the past, export agriculture has been centred on copra production, however, because of declining world copra prices, copra production in the FSM has declined so that in 1992, copra product exports were 0.8 per cent of FSM export products (FSM OPS). On the other hand, fisheries catch data since the beginning of the Compact has shown steady increases in total annual catch in the FSM from 113,538 metric tons in 1986 to 137,879 metric tons in 1991, with an increase in total access fees from $3.6 million to $13.3 million in 1991 (World Bank). In 1994, fishing rights fees generated $18.2 million dollars in revenues (IMF).

18. Tourism is an infant industry, but is already a significant contributor to the FSM economy in terms of employment, exports and income. The number of tourists visiting the FSM in 1990, totalled 23,171 (World Bank). Current tourist activity has centred largely on the attraction of marine, coastal and reef resources, wreck dives and the prehistoric attractions of Nan Madol (Pohnpei) and Lelu (Kosrae).

19. According to the FSM Trade Bulletin (1994), total export revenues in 1989 of $17.3 million increased to $49.3 million in 1993. However, during the same period, dependency on imports increased from $72.2 million to $109 million with a negative trade balance in 1993 of $60.2 million.

Table 1. Select FSM revenue and Spending, 1990-1994 in US$ millions

	1990	1992	1994
Total FSM revenues	163.6	158.4	165.1
Total domestic revenues	41.6	54.1	60.5
Taxes	13.5	17.6	24.0
Non-tax revenue	28.1	36.5	36.5
Grants	120.3	100.3	103.3
Compact	101.6	87.7	89.3
Other	18.7	12.7	14.0
Total spending	160.3	159.1	177.6
Current spending	109.1	128.7	138.7
Wages and salaries	48.8	53.3	58.5
Capital Spending	51.3	30.4	38.9
Overall balance	3.3	-0.7	-12.5

Source: International Monetary Fund

20. From the Second National Development Plan it estimated that of the 50,000 potential labour force in the FSM (1990: ages 15-64), 60.6 per cent (males: 74.5 per cent, females 46.9 per cent) were at work or seeking employment. Subsistence economy - agriculture and fisheries - accounts for 48 per cent of total employment, while 24 per cent of the workforce is employed by the state and national governments. Although an unemployment rate is difficult to calculate given the importance of the extended family and significance of the subsistence sector, it was estimated to be 13.5 per cent (males: 8.3 per cent, females: 21.8 per cent) of the total available FSM workforce.

21. According to the Second National Development Plan, the mean income per household in 1990 was approximately $5,580 with only 16 per cent of FSM households with zero income. Wages from government employment constitute 70 to 80 per cent of total wages, reflecting a high dependence of citizens on the government sector for employment.

Table 2. Sectoral distribution of employment by per cent, 1990

	Chuuk	Kosrae	Pohnpei	Yap	FSM
Total employment:					
Agriculture and fisheries	47	20	49	57	48
Industry and handicrafts	8	6	N/A	5	6
Government	24	47	23	21	24
Construction	8	8	8	4	7
Trade and other services	13	20	16	13	14

Source: Second FSM Development Pan - 1991

IV. HISTORY AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

22. Linguistic and archaeological evidence indicate that about 2,000 years ago, some of the ancestors of the present indigenous inhabitants of the FSM entered the eastern part of this island nation. They shared a common language family (Austronesian), similar horticultural and fishing practices and possessed highly sophisticated maritime technology and knowledge. For the next 1,500 years, these Austronesian speakers slowly dispersed westward perhaps as far as Yap island where earlier colonizers had successfully established a society (the oldest cultural deposit on Yap is dated to about 2,300 years ago). The indigenous histories (oral traditions) of the Federated States of Micronesia islands referred to establishment of close ties and affiliations among the members of the island societies comprising this nation. The Lelu ruins on Kosrae, circa AD 1400, and the Nan Madol ruins on Pohnpei, circa AD 1000, are among the most impressive remains of past human achievements in the FSM.

23. The 300-year period between AD 1500 and 1800 was an era of European exploration among the islands of FSM. The next hundred years saw the establishment of Christianity and foreign rule (Spanish and German). Between 1914 and 1945 this nation was governed by Japan.

24. In 1947, following the end of the Second World War, the FSM islands became a part of the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). A Trusteeship Agreement between the United Nations and the United States placed the islands under the administration of the United States. The Marshall Islands, Pohnpei, Chuuk, Yap, Palau and Saipan (Northern Marianas Islands) comprised the former TTPI and Kosrae was part of the Pohnpei district. In 1977 Kosrae became a separate district. It took over 30 years for the former TTPI to achieve some measure of self-government.

25. In 1965, the bicameral Congress of Micronesia, with elected Senators and Representatives from all the island groups in the TTPI, was formed. This was the first important step towards the eventual achievement of self-government. The Congress of Micronesia exercised broad legislative authority, subject to veto by the Administering Authority, represented by the High Commissioner. The Congress established the Future Political Status Commission to study and negotiate other political status alternatives. The work of the Commission eventually led to the signing of the Compact of Free Association with the United States and the termination of the Trust Territory.

26. On 12 July 1978, the four TTPI districts that would become the states of the Federated States of Micronesia ratified a constitution drafted by a popularly elected constitutional convention. Following national elections, the present national and state governments of the Federated States of Micronesia were installed and the Constitution took effect on 10 May 1979. Meanwhile, the Marianas Islands chose to become a Commonwealth of the United States, while Palau and the Marshall Islands ratified their own constitutional governments which resulted in the creation of the Republic of Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

27. The Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau separately negotiated a Compact of Free Association with the United States. In 1982 the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia and the Government of the United States executed a Compact of Free Association between the two countries and the voters of the Federated States of Micronesia chose to approve the Compact in 1983. The United States Congress approved the Compact in 1986 and the Trusteeship Agreement was terminated in 1990. Under the terms of the Compact of Free Association, the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia has full control over its internal and external affairs but the responsibility for the defense of the nation is delegated to the United States. On 17 September 1991, the Federated States of Micronesia attained membership in the United Nations.

28. The Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia incorporates the four States of Kosrae, Yap, Pohnpei and Chuuk. Each of the four States has its own constitution, elected legislature and governor. The Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and establishes a separation of the judicial, executive and legislative powers. The national legislature, the Congress of the FSM, is a unicameral parliament with 14 members popularly elected. The executive power consists of the President, elected by Congress, and a cabinet. The Constitution provides for a review of the governmental and national system every 10 years.